

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG

C O N F I D E N T I A L PEKING 0741

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT CH

SUBJECT: ASSESSMENT OF NEW PHASE IN PRC INTERNAL POLITICAL MOVEMENT

REF: A) HONG KONG 4452 B) STATE 086770

1. WE RECENTLY HAD OPPORTUNITY FOR CONSULTATIONS IN HONG KONG WHICH OFFERED EXCELLENT CHANCE TO DISCUSS OURS AND CONGEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON CURRENT INTERNAL POLITICAL MOVEMENT IN CHINA AS WELL AS ANALYSIS OF NEW PHASE CONTAINED REF A. THE FOLLOWING, THEREFORE, REPRESENTS NOT ONLY OUR THOUGHTS ON REF A ASSESSMENT BUT OUR IMPRESSIONS GROWING OUT OF CONVERSATIONS WITH CONGEN STAFF.

2. WE AGREE THAT A NEW PHASE IN THE MOVEMENT WAS REACHED WITH THE COMMENCEMENT OF ATTACKS ON INDIVIDUAL CHINESE LEADERS. THUS FAR THE PRINCIPAL TARGETS HAVE BEEN PROVINCIAL AND REGIONAL MILITARY FIGURES WHOSE POWER INCREASED SUBSTANTIALLY AS A RESULT OF THEIR ROLE IN REINING CHINA IN FROM THE BRINK OF CHAOS DURING THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION. RATHER THAN USING THESE ATTACKS AND THE ASSOCIATION OF THESE MILITARY FIGURES WITH LIN PIAO "AS A LEVER TO PRY THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION OPEN
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AGAIN" (PARA 3), WE ARE MORE INCLINED TO SEE THE

MOVEMENT AS A DIMINISHED CONTINUATION OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION. THE EFFORT AS WE SEE IT IS TO REDRESS THE POWER RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CENTRAL AND REGIONAL FORCES, BETWEEN LEFTIST AND CONSERVATION FORCES AND BETWEEN THE PARTY AND THE MILITARY. WE HAVE SEEN LITTLE EVIDENCE, HOWEVER, THAT ANY OF THE CONTENDING FORCES ARE SEEKING TO UNLEASH THE VIOLENCE OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION.

3. WE ALSO AGREE WITH HONG KONG THAT THE ISSUES ARE SHARPENED AND THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER MADE MORE URGENT BY THE FACT OF CHINA'S AGING LEADERSHIP. THE SUCCESSION PROBLEM IS THE KEY ISSUE AND THE QUESTION OF WHO AND WHAT AFTER MAO UNDERLIES NEARLY EVERY ASPECT OF THE MOVEMENT. TO THE LOOMING QUESTION OF MAO'S MORTALITY WE WOULD ADD THE IMPORTANT ADDITIONAL QUESTION OF CHOU'S LONGEVITY AND ABILITY TO CONTINUE AT THE PACE HE HAS MAINTAINED IN THE PAST. THERE IS INCREASING SPECULATION IN PEKING THAT CHOU MAY BE SEEKING A LESS ACTIVE ROLE AND THAT TENG HSIAO-PING IS BEING GROOMED TO ASSUME SOME OF HIS FUNCTIONS. WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THESE TWO MEN IS A KEY ISSUE TO BE WATCHED.

4. WE HAVE PREVIOUSLY INDICATED THAT WE HAVE DIFFICULTY WITH THE CONCEPT OF THE "LEFT" AND ITS DEFINITION. IF THE LEFT IS SEEN AS THOSE ELEMENTS OPPOSED TO THE PRAGMATIC POLICIES ADOPTED BY THE PRC IN RECENT YEARS, IT SEEMS TO HAVE HAD RELATIVELY LITTLE IMPACT ON CONCRETE POLICY DECISIONS AT THE CENTER. IN TERMS OF COMPOSITION, WE FIND IT DIFFICULT TO PUT THE SHANGHAI LEADERSHIP INTO THE MOLD OF XENOPHOBIC OPPOSITION TO CHINA'S OPENING TO THE WEST UNLESS SUCH ISSUES AS THE IMPORT OF FOREIGN TECHNOLOGY ARE SEEN PRIMARILY AS WEAPONS IN THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER HAVING LITTLE SUBSTANTIVE IMPORTANCE IN THEMSELVES. SIMILARLY, WE ARE LESS CERTAIN THAN HONG KONG OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHOU EN-LAI AND CHIANG CHING. THE LATTER CLEARLY IS PLAYING A MAJOR GUIDING ROLE IN THE CURRENT CAMPAIGN, AND SOME INTELLIGENCE REPORTS HAVE INDICATED HOSTILITY BETWEEN THE TWO. RECENTLY, HOWEVER, THEY HAVE APPEARED TOGETHER FREQUENTLY IN AN APPARENT EFFORT TO SHOW UNITY. CONFIDENTIAL

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WE THINK IT POSSIBLE THAT CHOU AND MADAME MAO MAY CURRENTLY SHARE SOME COMMON INTERESTS IN CONTROLLING THE MILITARY AND ASSERTING CENTRAL LEADERSHIP WHILE AT THE SAME TIME LOOKING TO THEIR FUTURE POWER POSITIONS IN A POST-MAO ERA.

5. WHILE WE AGREE WITH HONG KONG THAT TO ASSERT THAT THE PARTY IS IN CONTROL OVERSIMPLIFIES THE SITUATION

GIVEN THE VARIOUS CONTESTS FOR POWER WITHIN THE LEADERSHIP, WE HAVE USED THE PHRASE TO INDICATE THAT THE PARTY CADRE AT NEARLY ALL LEVELS SEEM TO BE DIRECTING THE CAMPAIGN IN THEIR UNITS. UNLIKE THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION THE INTENT THIS TIME DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE THE DESTRUCTION OF THE PARTY ORGANIZATION. THIS COULD CHANGE SUDDENLY, HOWEVER, SHOULD OLD ANTAGONISMS BORN IN THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION AGAIN BREAK OUT OR IF THE MILITARY WERE TO DECIDE TO USE FORCE IN RESPONSE TO PRESSURE ON THEM.

6. IN SUM, WE FIND OURSELVES IN BASIC AGREEMENT WITH MANY OF THE PREMISES UNDERLYING REFTEL ASSESSMENT. WHAT DIFFERENCES WE HAVE IN OUR INTERPRETATIONS OF THE PROBABLY COURSE OF DEVELOPMENTS FROM THESE PREMISES IS IN PART PROBABLY A FUNCTION OF OUR TWO DIFFERING GEOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVES. HONG KONG DRAWS UPON A MUCH BROADER BASE OF ANALYTICAL RESOURCES, WHILE WE FRANKLY ARE INFLUENCED BY WHAT WE SEE AND BY THE CHINESE--BOTH OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL--WITH WHOM WE HAVE CONTACT. WE FULLY AGREE THAT THE PRESENT STAGE OF THE POLITICAL MOVEMENTS PRESENTS A CONFUSING AND OFTEN-TIMES CONTRADICTORY PICTURE WHICH IS DIFFICULT TO ANALYZE AND PROJECT. WE FEEL--AND WE THINK HONG KONG AGREES--THAT TWO PERSPECTIVES AT THIS STAGE OF THE CAMPAIGN MAY BE USEFUL.

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